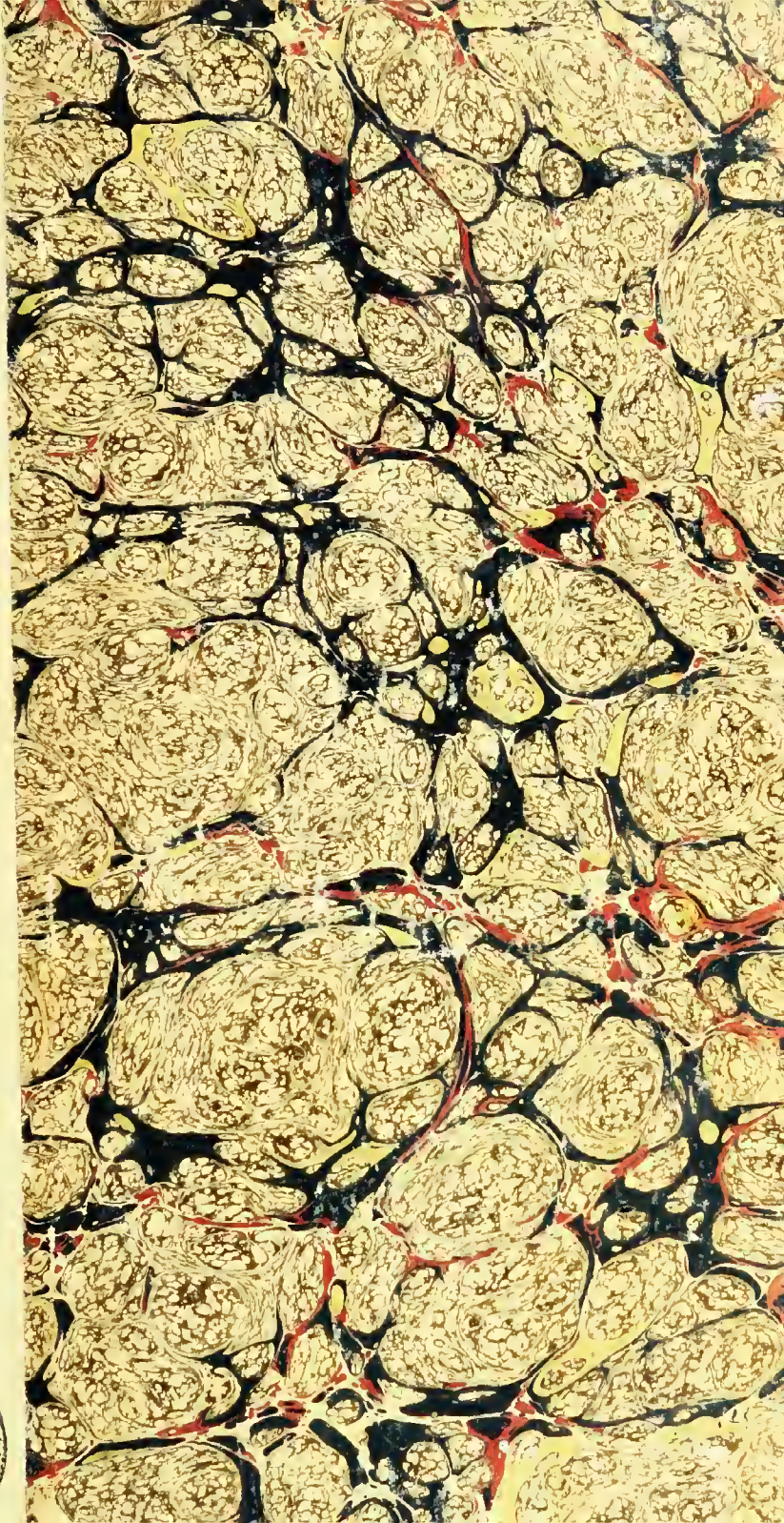


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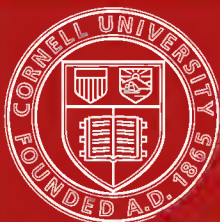
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# *Romances of Chivalry on Greek Soil*

BEING THE ROMANES LECTURE FOR 1911

BY

J. B. BURY

HON. D.LITT. OXON

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF MODERN HISTORY IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

DELIVERED

*IN THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE*

*25 MAY 1911*

OXFORD

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

1911

A.260281

HENRY FROWDE, M.A.

PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

LONDON, EDINBURGH, NEW YORK

TORONTO AND MELBOURNE

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## ROMANCES OF CHIVALRY ON GREEK SOIL

THE literary inheritance bequeathed by the ancient Greeks was not neglected by their posterity. It was held in such high honour that instead of being a source of inspiration it was allowed to exercise an intellectual tyranny. What the ancients had written on any subject except religion was invested with authority; they were assumed to have exhausted the whole range of secular knowledge and to have achieved all that was feasible in the realm of profane literature. The mediaeval Greeks lived and thought, not only under the yoke of the Church and the Church's interpretation of the universe, but also under the yoke of their classical antiquity. Their own literary productions, those which they valued most, consisted of inferior imitations of ancient models. The men and women of the better classes enjoyed a classical education, but it was more conventional than—shall I say?—classical education has been among ourselves; and while they did not succeed in penetrating into the spirit of pagan antiquity, they were unable to free themselves from the tyranny of their brilliant ancestors. Later Greek literature is the literature of men who were the slaves of tradition; it was a bondage to noble masters, but still it was a bondage; yet the prospect is relieved by some remarkable exceptions, to which I propose to invite your attention.

In a society tenacious of tradition and dominated by these two authorities—the incompatibility of which caused no embarrassment—we might expect that the most likely, if not the only, chance for the birth of fresh and original works of imagination would be impact and influence from another world, sufficiently strong and persistent and exciting. There was obviously an opportunity for influence of this kind in the last period of the history of the Byzantine Greeks, when they were overwhelmed, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, by the invasion of the Western knights, and Greece and the islands of the Aegean passed under the rule of Frenchmen and Italians. Throughout the three following centuries the two civilizations, Greek and Frank, were side by side.

The Frank invaders, who thus settled in the midst of the Greeks, had the fully developed institutions of Western chivalry, and it was a matter of course that the new literature of the twelfth century which was so intimately associated with chivalry, the Provençal romances of adventure, and the tales of the Arthurian cycle, should have circulated at the courts of the barons who ruled in Hellenic lands. The poetry of the French romance writers proved its cosmopolitan quality by its reception in Germany, Italy, and England. Could it fail in Greece, where the external conditions for its reception seemed incomparably more favourable? Western women were not very numerous in the Frank colonies, and there was much intermarrying between the foreigners and Greek ladies. In this mixed society there followed, in the course of time, a demand for romances of love and chivalrous adventure in the Greek tongue, and the demand was partly met by adaptations of French poems. For instance, the story of Floire and Blanceflor, the romance of Pierre of Provence and

the fair Maguelonne, the Arthurian tale of Gyron le Courtois, were worked up in Greek. This fact entitles us to speak of a literary reception. Such versions and adaptations, however, do not constitute alone a reception of much value. But original poems of chivalrous adventure were also produced, and the character of these must decide in what measure the imagination of the Greeks was affected by the foreign literature which had come their way. If we take as a sort of standard the intellectual conquest of Rome by Greece, the greatest perhaps of all literary receptions, did their acquaintance with Western romances move the Greeks to produce works impregnated with Western ideas in the same way as the Odes of Horace or the Eclogues and Aeneid of Virgil are charged with the influence of their Hellenic masters? Or to take a lesser example, did French romance inspire Greek poets as it inspired Teutonic singers like Wolfram and Gottfried?

Let me take a romance of adventure and love, composed by a nameless Greek in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, the story of *Belthandros and Chrysantza*. The poem is short, about as long as two books of Homer, and the plot is slight enough. The Emperor Rhodophilus has two purple-born sons, Philarmos and Belthandros, who are devoted to each other. The younger, Belthandros, is remarkable for his beauty and bravery, his prowess in hunting, and his skill in archery. But his father has taken a dislike to him, and treats him with intolerable rigour. The slights which are put upon him furnish the motive for his decision to leave his country and seek adventures in foreign lands. In spite of his brother's tearful dissuasions he rides forth with three attendants, and on the first night he pitches his tent in a meadow lit by a full moon, and, taking his lute, utters in song his sadness, and a vague foreboding that

some strange secret of destiny is awaiting him. Overtaken here by men whom his father has sent to bring him back, when they threaten to use force he slays ten of them. Continuing his journey through the kingdom of the Turks in Asia Minor, he has an adventure with brigands, and reaches Tarsus. In this neighbourhood he comes one day to a small stream, and sees a star-like flame dancing in the water. His curiosity excited at this strange apparition, he determines to discover the source, and rides upstream for ten days. Then he comes to a magnificent castle, built of sardonyx, with a diamond gate. Above the portal he reads this inscription :

Of him, who never felt Love's dart,  
A million shafts shall pierce the heart  
If in the fortalice of Love  
He see the inner halls thereof.

Belthandros thus learns that he has come to the Erotokastron, the Castle of Love. After long hesitation, he resolves that he cannot depart without fulfilling the quest and finding the source of the *phlogopotamon*, the flame-lit stream. Leaving the servants outside, he enters the court, which is radiant with flowers and trees. In the centre is an artificial fountain, and in the water which spouted through the lips of a griffin the mysterious flame again appears, as the griffin moves. The poet lingers with evident enjoyment over the artistic decorations of the castle, which resembles not the châteaux of Western Europe but the palaces of Byzantium. In the *triklinos* or great hall Belthandros solves the problem of the flame. He sees the fiery source issuing from the eyes of an image of sapphire. He notices an inscription on the image, and is amazed to read his own name. 'Belthandros,' said the writing, 'second son of Rhodophilus, the crowned lord of the Roman Empire, is pining for love of Chrysantza, daughter of the great

king of Antioch.' The young man was disturbed and dismayed to find that the stream's secret imported a secret of his own personal destiny, and he pitied himself exceedingly. He was thrown into deeper agitation when he discovered that another image, the heart of which was cleft by an arrow, bore another inscription, and its tenor was: 'Chrysantza, whose name has been inscribed by Fate, and Belthandros, these two Love has parted asunder.' Repenting the hour in which he had come to the castle, he recognizes that he has seen the writing of Fate, his *μοιρογράφισμα*, and resigns himself to the exploration of all the bitter and sweet beauties of Love's palace—

*τὰς πικρογλυκοχάριτας τοῦ Ἐρωτοκάστρου τούτου.*

This *μοιρογράφισμα*, the idea of a love predestined between two persons who had never seen each other, is the central idea of the poem.

Belthandros was still inspecting the courts of mystery when night fell, dark and moonless. A winged love suddenly hovered before him, and said, 'Come instantly, Belthandros, the Emperor calls thee.' He found the Emperor of the Loves seated on a throne, crowned and sceptred, a golden arrow in his hand. When he had told his story, the sovran said, 'I have forty noble women here, all royal ladies, daughters of kings, chosen for their beauty, and I desire thee, using thine own judgement, to pick out the fairest.' He gave Belthandros a wand of three substances, gold, iron, and ruby, to be bestowed on her whom he selected as the queen of all.

The prince then found himself alone, until he suddenly became aware of a company of forty beautiful women sitting outside the terrace. They came one by one to be inspected; and he told each of them her defect with brutal candour. The fortieth, of course, was perfect,

and received the rod. Summoned again to the presence of the master of the house to give an account of his judgement, he describes with rapture the charms of the lady to whom he awarded the prize. 'She fell,' he said, 'from the arms of the moon, robbing her of her radiance.' When he had finished, Love and his attendant train, and the forty women, vanished, and Belthandros made his way out of the castle and rode off with his servants.

This beauty-show was not borrowed, so far as we know, from any literary predecessor, nor need we suppose that the author was indebted to the ancient judgement of Mount Ida. He has simply translated into fiction the old Byzantine custom of the bride-show. At one period the young emperors used to marry not foreign princesses, who were regarded as barbarians, but Greek ladies; and for this purpose discreet messengers were sent into the provinces to discover maidens who were well educated and refined, and conformed to a certain canon of beauty. These agents were provided with measures—the measure, for instance, of the ideal foot. All the girls who were chosen assembled on a certain day in the palace at Constantinople, and the bride was selected by the young man, generally under the auspices of his mother. The judgement of beauty in the Castle of Love is a Byzantine bride-show in a Byzantine palace.

The sequel of the future of Belthandros can be briefly told. He reaches Antioch, and enters the service of the king. Here we have come into a dominion where the feudal system prevails. Belthandros has to become the king's *lizios*—the Greek form of 'liegeman'. The king is a *ῥῆγας*, his wife is a *ῥῆγίνα*; for the title *Basileus* was strictly reserved for the emperor. It is clear that the poet conceives Antioch as a Frank dominion, but he does not say so; he leaves this vague, and the king's

daughter, Chrysantza, has a Greek name. Belthandros recognizes her as the maiden to whom he had awarded the wand, and she, too, recognizes him; for the poet conceives that she was actually present on that night in the Castle of Love. For more than four years they woo each other by secret signs; at last they meet in a garden and declare their love. When he leaves her, Belthandros, who had no right to enter the garden, is arrested by the guards who were set to keep watch over the princess. The danger which threatened the prince at this discovery is diverted by a device of Chrysantza. Her devoted maid, Phaidrokaza, pretends that Belthandros had entered the forbidden precincts for a tryst with herself; and the king immediately arranges a marriage between his liegeman and his daughter's maid. For nearly a year Belthandros carried on his amour with the mistress under cover of his marriage with her servant, and no one else knew of the matter except his own squires. But he became uneasy; he feared that the business might leak out, and he induced Chrysantza to fly with him. Accompanied by their faithful attendants, they escaped from the palace one dark and stormy night. In crossing a swollen river the servants and horses were drowned, and the hero and heroine were washed ashore on opposite banks. Each thinks that the other is dead. Wandering along the edge, Chrysantza comes on the body of one of the men; the features are defaced, but as the clothes and sword of Belthandros are near she believes that the corpse is his, and is about to kill herself when she hears his voice in the distance calling her by name. He swims across, and they make their way down the river to the sea-coast. A ship is approaching. It is a Greek ship, bearing a search party sent by the Emperor Rhodophilus to search the world for Belthandros. His

elder son had recently died, and he had set his heart on discovering the younger, who was now heir to the throne. Thus Belthandros returned to his native country and was duly married to the heroine.

In this romance the machinery is the most striking part, and occupies the central place. The Castle of Love, which Belthandros finds near such a familiar place as Tarsus, is undisguised magic—like the forest of Broceliande, or the castle in which Parzival saw the Holy Grail. This magic is more satisfactory than if the experience had been represented as a dream. An improbable dream is less interesting than make-believe reality, provided the illusion is well managed, and this poet has managed it with skill. The idea of the *phlogopotamon*, the mystery of the flame glancing on the water, which draws Belthandros to the abode of Love, gives his romance a certain poetical distinction. But the machinery is too large and impressive for the rest of the story; we feel that the plot, as it is worked out, is too slight to justify the elaboration of the machinery. In particular, the prediction which Belthandros read in the Castle of Love, that he and Chrysantza would be sundered apart, is fulfilled by their separation for a few hours on the opposite sides of a river. There is here an inartistic disproportion between the prophecy and the event. There is, too, an almost insolent carelessness in allowing the crude coincidence, by which Belthandros and Chrysantza reach the seashore at the very moment when his father's ship is approaching.

The poem is Greek from beginning to end, in its setting, its descriptions, its ideas. There is nothing in it which we can say must have been due to Western influence. The poet is acquainted with the feudal relations of liegeman and lord, as every Greek was in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But the



Frankish element enters so little into the texture of the story that even the heroine, who ought to have a Latin name, is called Chrysantza, and described as purple born. It has been ingeniously suggested that Belthandros and Rhodophilus are transformations of the names Bertrand and Rudolf, but the poet, as if to show that he is not drawing upon Western literature, intimates expressly that the names are Greek—and so they are.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Greek though the poem is, it has an unmistakable kinship with the French *romans d'aventure*.

Another poem of chivalry, *Lybistros and Rhodamne*, has a very similar motif. The general gist of the argument may be stated in a sentence. It was revealed to Lybistros in a dream that he is destined to wed Rhodamne, whose fate is revealed in like manner to her; he discovers and wins her; then they are separated by magical means, and in the end he finds her again. This is the groundwork; but the construction is intricate and the poem in every way more elaborate than the tale of Belthandros. The first thing to be noticed is that the poet is expressly sympathetic with the world of Latin chivalry. The hero is conceived as a Latin prince, and wears Latin costume. The heroine, daughter of an Indian king, admires Frank customs. The name of the hero's rival, a king of Egypt, is Berderichos, that is, Bertrich; and the claim of the two suitors for Rhodamne's hand is decided by a tournament.

The love-making of Lybistros and Rhodamne by correspondence forms a substantial part of the story. The lover has to attach his letters to arrows and shoot them into the garden of the princess. Some of the letters are

<sup>1</sup> If the poem was written in Rhodes (a possible supposition) the choice of the name Rhodophilus for the imaginary Basileus would be explained.

charming in their way, but they lack the subtlety which would please the 'ladies who have intelligence in love' of France and Italy. I may take as a specimen the first letter that Rhodamne wrote to her lover:—

'I shrieked it to heaven, I told it to the clouds, I made earth my witness and the air, that never would I bow my neck beneath the bond of love. And now—my unbending purpose has been bent, my pride subdued, the plan of my behaviour changed. The freedom of my will I have made thy bonds slave. I forswear from this hour the oath I made to heaven, the sacred oath I swore to the clouds. I avow it, and I write thee this my letter,—no small thing I deem it.'

The correspondence is somewhat too long, but the author has introduced an element wanting in *Belthandros*, where the interest turns entirely on the adventures.

The fatality of Love is a central idea as in *Belthandros*, and his destiny is revealed to Lybistros by the same kind of machinery. There can indeed be hardly a doubt that the poet knew *Belthandros* and borrowed the device. But he has avoided the error of allowing it a disproportionate place in his story, and he has so sophisticated it that it has a different poetical value. Lybistros, too, visits the fortress and gardens of Love; but there is no magic; he visits them in dreams; and the mansion, which is called Erotokratia, is pervaded by an atmosphere of allegory. Love himself assumes three forms—of a child, a man in his prime, and an old man; and he is surrounded by allegorical figures, Agape ('Affection'), Pothos ('Longing'), Kremasmos ('Suspense'). Thus, instead of the illusion of reality, successfully achieved in *Belthandros*, we have here allegory and dream. Moreover, while in *Belthandros* love is accepted simply as an irresistible power, here its claims are defended on philosophical grounds. Its cult is vindicated. The ideal hero must be trained in the school of love,

ἔρωτοπαιδευμένος, and he who denies its claims is *χωρικός*—rustic or provincial.

The Erotokratia of this poem cannot fail to remind us of the close, surrounded by castled walls, in the Romance of the Rose. It, too, is a dream-castle, peopled with allegorical figures; the dreamer, like Lybistros, is a scorner of Love, and like him makes complete submission to the god. This mansion, in which Love dwelled, was not an invention of the thirteenth-century poet William de Lorris. He owed it, as M. Langlois has shown, to older poems in which a garden and palace of Love were described, especially the fableau of *Dieu d'amours* and the *Altercation of Phyllis and Flora*; and in the *Dieu d'amours*, as in *Lybistros* and the Romance of the Rose, the divine place is seen in a dream. These works establish that the idea of a beautiful dwelling of Love appeared in French literature in the twelfth century.<sup>1</sup> But we may safely say that this idea did not travel from the West to the East. The courts to which Belthandros wandered, and of which Lybistros dreamed, have no features which a Greek poet need have looked abroad

<sup>1</sup> M. Langlois thinks that the idea was suggested by lines of Tibullus (i. 3, 58):—

Ipsa Venus campos ducet in Elysios.  
hic choreae cantusque uigent passimque uagantes  
dulce sonant tenui gutture carmen aues, &c.

Compare, in the *Altercatio Phyllidis et Florae*,

sonant omnes uolucrum linguae uoce plena, &c.

I may point out, as some support for the conjecture, that in the *Dieu d'amours* Love's abode is called *Champ fleuri*. Now, in *Floire et Blanceflor*, when Floire supposes that Blanceflor is dead, he says (l. 777) :

M'ame la m'amie sivra,  
En *camp-flori* la trovera  
Ou el queut encontre moi flors.

This perhaps supplies the link.

to invent. And in other Greek poems of the same period, where there is no question of Western influence, we find castles of allegorical persons—the Castle of Misfortune, the Castle of Sophrosyne.<sup>1</sup> I may add that the device of supernatural machinery for bringing lovers together probably goes back to Callimachus. It seems to have been through the deliberate intervention of the god Eros that Acontius and Cydippe met each other at the festival of Delos.

But what shall we say of the vision of Lybistros? Has it any obligation to the visions of the French dreamers? We need not think so. The revelation of two lovers to one another by means of dreams is an ancient Oriental motif, which was introduced into Greek literature by Chares in the days of Alexander the Great. And as to the other resemblance—the defiant sentiment which Lybistros and Rodamne, and the hero of the Romance of the Rose entertained towards Love—this furnishes no case for the assumption of borrowing. The subjugation of scorers of Love is an ancient motif, which the French derived from the old Latin poets, and which had never disappeared from Greek fiction. In another curious Greek romance of the same period, the love-story of *Achilles*, we also find the idea of defiance followed by submission. Like Lybistros, Achilles is at first an Hippolytus who scorns Love and is then subdued by him, but without the help of machinery. In this poem, also, the interest of the Greek poet in Western chivalry is undisguised. The cheeks of the son of Aphrodite and Peleus are shaven in the manner of the Franks; he unhorses a Frank cavalier whom none of the Greeks could

<sup>1</sup> See Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur*, ed. 2, p. 860.

master. The heroine Polyxena affected French costumes.

The imagination of these poets has been struck by some of the ways and fashions of the Franks, but all these Western touches are adventitious and decorative. That they are superimposed as ornament upon Greek stories is hardly concealed. Consider that the daughter of the Frank king of Antioch is named Chrysantza; consider that the Frank Lybistros has a name that is not Frank: consider, again, that the Indian king Chrysos and his daughter are Greeks in name and customs. A tournament (τῆδοτρα, 'joust') indeed is held at their court, but when Lybistros is promoted to be the colleague of his father-in-law the whole ceremony is Byzantine. Take the furniture of the tales. The descriptions of luxurious palaces and gardens, which are a conventional feature of these romances, presume the art and luxury of Byzantium. In the Tale of Achilles there is a golden plane-tree in the garden of Polyxena, with golden birds on the branches, each of which sings its own song. Singing birds of gold were also seen by Belthandros in the Castle of Love. A mechanism of this kind was one of the wonders in the palace of the emperors at Constantinople. But the taste for descriptions of gardens, marvellous fountains, and works of art has also a long literary tradition among the Greeks. It can be traced in the prose romances of the Alexandrine school—sometimes called the novels of the sophists—a species of literature which reaches back into the Hellenistic period and comes down to the twelfth century. These fantastic love-tales, with their antique flavour, had a decisive influence on the poems of which I am speaking.

So much for the staging and apparatus; they are Greek. What about the plots? Here the affinity to

many of the *romans d'aventure* is manifest. But there is not the least reason for supposing that the Greeks were indebted to Provence. On the contrary. Provence did not produce original fiction. Her poets only wrought up, in their inimitable manner, arguments which they derived from foreign sources. And chief among these sources were tales which circulated in the Greek and Oriental worlds, and which reached France not in books but by transmission from mouth to mouth—some, it has been conjectured, through Greek channels.<sup>1</sup> Such floating matter was shaped independently by the Greeks. We have an example in the adventurous romance of *Callimachus and Chrysorhoe*, written possibly by a member of the Palaeologus family towards the end of the thirteenth century; it can be shown that this poem was constructed out of various legends of enchantment which were current in Greece.

But there are other features in our romances which have still to be accounted for. We are in a sensibly different atmosphere from that of the Alexandrine novels. The heroes, Lybistros and his fellows, are not pseudo-antique figures, descendants of the young men who frequented the Hellenistic gymnasia; they are warriors, *καβαλλάριοι*, peers of the Western knights. Transfer them to Provence, and they would be at home with the heroes of troubadour fiction. The Greeks had no word for knight-errant, but they coined a verb which expresses a similar notion, *κοσμοαναγυρεύειν*, to roam the world on a quest. Must we then resort here to the hypothesis of Western influence and suppose that the Greek poets borrowed from the

<sup>1</sup> See M. Édélestand du Ménil's introduction to his edition of *Floire et Blanceflor* (1856).

Franks both the idea of a knight and the fantastic ideal of chivalrous adventure?

I think not. The *kavallarioi* of these romances have a different lineage. In prowess and manliness they rival the knights of the West; but they constitute no order; there is no institution of knighthood, none of the distinctive customs of Latin chivalry like the new knight's vigil over his arms. The Latin institution was not the model which produced the Greek ideal. For the Greeks already had their own. While Latin chivalry was developing into a social fact, under feudal conditions, *there was an analogous but perfectly independent development of a chivalrous ideal in the Greek-speaking world*, and to show this I must ask you to accompany me into a different field of literature.

Before the Crusades there was another experience, both persistent and exciting, which made a deep impression upon the Greeks—their experience of the world of Islam. An intercourse of many centuries, the commerce of war but also the commerce of peace, did not fail to lead to mutual influence of the Greek and Saracen civilizations. For generation after generation the tide of strife flowed backward and forward over the mountain barriers, and was the great imminent fact for the Christian population of Asia Minor. This perennial war and all it meant entered into their very soul. To hold the mountain passes—everything depended on that; and the commanders of frontier fortresses, Greek and Saracen, maintained continually a wild irregular warfare, full of surprises and adventurous incidents. These circumstances developed a new type of warrior, a *kavallarios*, whose heart was set on adventure and who was accustomed to act independently of orders from the emperor or a military superior. These watchers of the frontier were popularly

called *akritai* or hillsmen, and in the tenth century many of them possessed large domains and resembled feudal barons rather than Roman officers.

In this novel world, abounding in excitement, the popular imagination was touched into a creative effort. Hitherto men of Greek speech had only once been stirred by the epic impulse; they had produced only one popular epic cycle, the Homeric poems. The holy war with the Saracens led to the birth of another. The epic of *Digenes Akrites* is divided by an immeasurable interval in art from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; but it stands out in the history of Greek literature after Homer as the only national epic, and it has Homeric qualities. In Western Europe its name is hardly known; yet it has had its fortunes elsewhere. The *Nibelungenlied* exercised no influence on literature beyond Germany; the poem of *Digenes* had a career in the steppes of Russia.

This poem has no tragic interest in it, like the *Iliad*, or like that other epic of which the background is warfare with unbelievers, the *Song of Roland*. There is no catastrophe as in the *Odyssey*. It is a biography in which the incidents lead up to no culmination; the hero, stricken by a malady, ends his adventurous life peacefully in his bed. The cycle of stories from which the epic was constructed have perhaps their nearest parallel in the ballads in which the mythopoeic fancy of the Spaniards celebrated the possibly historical figure of the Cid. But though a central dramatic motif is wanting, the *Digenes* has an epic quality, which justifies us in naming it along with Homer and the *Nibelungenlied*—its comprehensiveness. As Homer reflects all sides of a certain stage of early Greek civilization, as the *Nibelungen* song mirrors the civilization of the Germans during the period of the migrations,



so the Digenes cycle presents a comprehensive picture of the Byzantine world in Asia Minor and of the frontier life. It is a cycle of popular tales which gathered round the figure of an ideal *akrites* or warden of the marches, and have come down to us as they were put together by some nameless poet in the shape of an epic. The hero is called Digenes, the man of two races, because his mother was a Greek, connected with historic families, and his father a Saracen emir who captured her in a raid and became for her love a Christian. Thus his name is symbolic of the mutual influence of the two hostile empires. His deeds of prowess begin at the age of twelve, when he slays a bear and a lion. His ambition is fired by the fame of the lawless bands of free-lances who lived in the frontier hills and were a terror not only to Moslems but to Christians, on both of whom they preyed. They were known as *apelatai* or drivers; we might translate the word by 'cattle-lifters'. Digenes destroyed or reduced these predatory hillsmen, and the Christians enjoyed peace. In love he was also triumphant. The rumour came to his ear of the wonderful beauty of Eudoxia, daughter of a governor of one of the provinces of Asia Minor. Her father kept her under lock and key, and the numerous suitors who attempted to carry her away paid the penalty with their lives. Digenes serenades her, wins her affection, and bears her off. Pursued by her father and brothers he overcomes their men, and forces the governor to consent to the marriage. His passionate devotion for this lady endures till death. He has other amorous adventures, like Odysseus, but the devotion of his heart to Eudoxia is not more seriously endangered by these episodes than the affection of the lover of Circe and Calypso for Penelope.

The emperor, who had heard of his wonderful exploits, paid him a visit in his palace on the Euphrates, and the description of this abode reflects the fashions of Byzantine luxury. The tone of their intercourse is significant. While Digenes formally professes himself a devoted servant, they meet far more as equals than as subject and servant. The warrior has a position of virtual independence, like that of a powerful Western baron.

Idyllic scenes—repose in pleasant shady meadows near waters—were a stereotyped feature in the Greek romances, and descriptions of such scenes were a conventional topic with Hellenistic rhetors. But they occur also in the epic. Digenes retired with his wife to a lovely meadow in which he pitched his tent. 'The ground,' he says, 'was embroidered with radiant flowers. There were trees and tall reeds. A fresh spring welled in the midst of the meadow, and near it were deep pools in which the flowers and trees were reflected. The wood was full of birds which sang more sweetly than sirens; there were parrots on the boughs, swans on the water; peacocks displayed their plumage in rivalry of the flowers; but the brilliant beauty of the lady outshone the flowers and the birds.'<sup>1</sup> We may suspect that the epic poet was influenced here by sophistic fiction, but he has succeeded in investing with freshness a conventional scene.

While the violence and brutalities of the frontier warfare are not veiled, Digenes is portrayed as an accomplished cavalier, not only invincible in combat and insatiably eager for adventure, but courteous to ladies, modest about his own exploits, and, as M. Diehl has observed, capable of delicate emotions. He is the

<sup>1</sup> The epic has come down in different recensions, and the descriptions of this scene differ in elaboration.

prototype of the cavaliers of the romances. And not only in the ideal of the cavalier, but also in the treatment of love, the atmosphere of the romances has, we might say, been constituted by the atmosphere of the epic, though new ingredients have been added. In the epic, love is only one note, though a leading note; in the romances it is the main motif, and it is idealized, and dissociated from real life, and invested with mystery. The romancers have worked, as we saw, under the influence of the sophistic novelists; they have adopted some of the tricks of their masters; they have introduced the Hellenistic personification of Love—the irresistible king with deadly arrows, and the conception of heroes or heroines who at first defy the god. Now Hellenistic antiquity also influenced the French romances. The authors of the most typical French poems went back to ancient erotic literature, taking Ovid as their *doctor egregius* and his *Ars amatoria* as their scripture—*quasi evangelium*. But the Greek poets, who simply continued an unbroken tradition, did not, like the French, propound a new science of love. They did not subtilize the passion after the manner of the troubadours, or sophisticate it by any such refined doctrines as were woven around it by writers like Alan the Chaplain or expert ladies like the Countess Marie of Champagne, who acted as umpires in *affaires de cœur* and solved questions of amorous casuistry. Though the Greek romantic poets resorted to various devices, suggested by the Alexandrine novelists, to enhance the interest of their theme by mystery, though they made love more artificial, less naïve, yet, in the sentiment and the psychology, the epic exerted a supreme influence.

From all this it follows that there was a parallel development in French and Greek lands. As the French romances of the twelfth century had a mass of epic

poetry behind them, so the Greek romances of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had an epic background too. In both cases the treatment of romantic motives was affected by influences derived directly or indirectly from the Hellenistic world; in France, through deliberate recourse to Latin literature and especially Ovid; in Greece, through a literary tradition which had never died. If this parallelism is taken along with the fact that stories and motives travelled, by whatever devious ways, from the East to the West, it is not surprising that the Greek and some of the French romances should have a family likeness. For direct literary indebtedness we must wait till the sixteenth century, and visit the Island of Crete, where we shall find a certain Cornaro, a Hellenized Venetian, composing a long and tedious romance (the *Errotokritos*), which is saturated with Italian influence.

A few words may be said about the language and metre of the poems. Both the epic and the romances are composed in the colloquial language—I do not mean the rustic language, but the speech of educated people in contradistinction to the literary Greek which was employed in serious works. The metre is also the same. It is that form of verse which was most used in the popular poetry of the Middle Ages—alternate verses of eight and seven syllables modulated by accent and not by quantity. It is the metre of—

In Scarlet towne where I was born  
There was a fair maid dwellin’.

In the period which we have been considering there was no rhyme. Rhyme afterwards came in, and its effect is unfortunate in longer poems; the jingle becomes insupportable. It is possible that this metre, which corresponds in beat to the iambic tetrameters of Greek

comedy, may have been the most suitable to the aptitudes of the language when the principle of quantity was abandoned for that of accent.

In the vocabulary and diction the influence of the epic is patent. But the romantic poets elaborated the style by devices. They cultivated the use of long epithets of seven or eight syllables which filled a whole verse, and they could appeal to classical literature for the propriety of this device. Such compounds occur occasionally in *Digenes*; they are a feature in the romances. Some of them become conventional, like *μυριοχαριτωμένος*, 'endued with a million graces,' or *ήλιογεννημένη*, 'daughter of the sun.' They are often accumulated in descriptions of art and beauty, such epithets, for instance, as *κρυσταλλοχιονοτράχηλος*, 'with neck like crystal snow,' *στρογγυλεμορφοπούγουνη*, 'with round shapely chin.' The poet of Rhodamne converts her name into *Έρωτικο-ροδάμνη*—reminding us of *Liebröschen* or Love-lily.

If I may now briefly resume my argument, the Greeks already possessed, along with their own technique, all the ideas, material, and apparatus for romances of chivalry when the Western knights came and established themselves within their borders. And just on this account it is not surprising that, although the comingling of the two cultures, Western and Greek, afforded to the French literature of chivalry an unrivalled opportunity for exercising here the potency of charm which it wrought elsewhere, there was no result that can be compared, for instance, to the reception of French romances in Germany. The romantic literature of the West did not come as a new revelation to a people who possessed in their own literature motives, ideals, and a tradition of fantastic fiction which were in many respects homogeneous. Yet the close contact with the French and Italian settlers did exert an influence. I do

not mean merely that the ways and customs of the foreigners offered material to the Greek poets for decoration and accessory effects. I mean a provocative influence. There was a demand for fiction of the same class as the French romances, and Greek writers responded to it not only by versions, but also by original creations. These creations, however, are of Greek, not foreign parentage; they have a native, not a foreign tradition behind them—the mediaeval epic and the amorous fiction which originated in the Hellenistic age. They are inferior to the best compositions of the French poets; nothing was produced that could be compared remotely, for instance, with *Aucassin et Nicolette*. They have not the stamp of cosmopolitan literature. You may care for them or not, but they are not exotics nor second-hand imitations. Western Europe played a decisive part in creating the social conditions under which they appeared; but they are in all essential features, in spirit and matter, as well as in form, an outcome of indigenous development, the legitimate progeny of a literature which was always accustomed to take little and give much.











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